

Back pain is a common problem. Most of the time it is due to mechanical problems of the bones, joints, muscles, and tissues of the back, and is not serious. Less commonly it could be due to nerve compression related problems.

If you experience any of the following symptoms together with back pain, you should see a doctor urgently, as they may point towards a serious cause and will need early medical attention.

- Acute severe back pain
- Having fever
- Loss of appetite
- Recent unexplained weight loss
- Fall from a height
- Difficulty in walking
- Problems with bladder or bowel function
- New numbness/tingling
- Lack of improvement with rest

There are several things you can do to help reduce your back pain:-

- In the acute phase your doctor may advise you to rest
- Avoid lifting heavy weights
- Maintain proper posture
- Use cold or hot packs
- Physiotherapy and exercises as guided by your doctor
- Staying physically active helps to recover quicker. Initially, this may be difficult, but with time, you may be able to gradually increase your level of activity.

Depending on the results of investigations and the cause of your back pain, your doctor may also recommend the following treatments:-

- Simple pain killers- e.g. paracetamol, diclofenac
- Additional medications for nerve related pain
- Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS)
- Rarely, if the pain does not respond to the above, your doctor may refer you for injections of pain killers into your spine (spinal epidural injection)
- If the pain is refractory, or there are neurological deficits, you may be referred for spinal imaging

Surgery may be indicated in certain circumstances -:

- Significant compression of the spinal cord or the nerves running down to the lower limbs
- Bladder or bowel dysfunction
- Poor response to previous medical treatment